

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SEOUL 02992 120858Z
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SUBJ: KIM TAE-CHUNG'S RESIGNATION HAS LIMITED IMPACT ON NDP

REF: SEOUL 2569 (DTG 290840Z MAR 78)

1. KIM TAE-CHUNG'S RESIGNATION FROM OPPOSITION NDP (REPORTED REFTEL) HAS HAD LITTLE IMPACT ON KOREAN POLITICS SO FAR. LOCAL COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA HAVE NOT REPORTED STORY BUT, WHILE GENERAL PUBLIC MAY BE UNAWARE OF KIM'S DECISION, POLITICIANS OF ALL PARTIES AND DISSIDENTS DO SEEM TO HAVE THE WORD.

2. DIVERSE SOURCES, INCLUDING SOME CLOSE TO MRS KIM, AGREE THAT KIM RESIGNED IN ORDER TO PREVENT ANY POSSIBILITY THAT HE WOULD BE NOMINATED AS NDP CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT THIS YEAR. OF COURSE, KIM COULD NOT BE TRUE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. AS A CONVICTED VIOLATOR OF EM-9, HE LACKS CIVIL RIGHTS AND CANNOT HOLD PUBLIC OFFICE. FURTHERMORE, YUSIN CONSTITUTION GIVES NCU--NOT THE PARTIES--THE RIGHTS TO NOMINATE AND ELECT THE PRESIDENT. STILL, SOME ELEMENTS IN THE NDP WERE TOYING WITH THE IDEA OF NOMINATING KIM AS A SYMBOL OF THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SEOUL 02992 120858Z

PARTY'S REJECTION OF THE YUSIN SYSTEM. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE WERE SOME RUMORS--MOST LIKELY FANCIFUL--THAT THE ROKG WOULD WELCOME KIM'S INFORMAL NOMINATION IN AN ELECTION HE COULD NOT WIN. IN ANY EVENT, MOST OBSERVERS AGREE THAT KIM WAS UNWILLING TO LEND HIS NAME TO SUCH A PROJECT, PERHAPS BECUASE INTERNATIONAL OPINION MIGHT BE CONFUSED INTO THINKING THAT A REAL CONTEST FOR THE

PRESIDENCY IS POSSIBLE IN KOREA.

3. WITH THE NDP LOCKED IN NOISY FACTIONAL STRIFE OVER WHETHER TO CALL A NOMINATING CONVENTION OR NOT, KIM'S DEFECTION MIGHT CONCEIVABLY HAVE SHAKEN THE PARTY AND PERHAPS EVEN KOREA'S TWO-PARTY SYSTEM. KIM WAS A STRONG CONTENDER AS NDP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND HAS ADMIRERS IN THE PARTY, INCLUDING SOME WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. SO FAR, HOWEVER, NO NDP ASSEMBLYMEN OR PROMINENT PARTY OFFICIALS HAS CHOSEN TO COPY KIM'S EXAMPLE AND SEVER HIS TIES WITH THE PARTY. INDEED, KIM'S RESIGNATION DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE INFLUENCED THE COURSE OF FACTIONAL INFIGHTING CURRENTLY TAKING PLACE IN THE PARTY. AS ONE OUTSPOKEN ANTI-GOVT NDP ASSEMBLYMAN PUT IT, THE NDP WITH ALL ITS WEAKNESSES IS STILL THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN FOR PRACTICAL OPPOSITION POLITICAL ACTIVITY.

4. DUP LEADER YANG IL-TONG TOLD EMBOFF THAT KIM'S RESIGNATION WAS A "MORAL ENDORSEMENT" OF DUP THESIS THAT NDP WAS A SHAM POLITICAL OPPOSITION AND WOULD HELP DUP AND INDEPENDENTS IN ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS LATER THIS YEAR OR EARLY NEXT YEAR. HOWEVER, HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT KIM HAD NOT ENDORSED THE DUP AS SUCH.

5. DISSIDENTS FEEL RESIGNATION ENDED ANOMALOUS CONNECTION
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PAGE 03 SEOUL 02992 120858Z

BETWEEN KIM AND NDP, WHICH THEY CONSIDER OPPOSITION PARTY IN NAME ONLY. THEY FEEL THAT SHAMELESS POLITICIANS ASSOCIATED WITH NDP WILL CARRY ON AS BEFORE. THEY DOUBT THAT NDP WILL DO WORSE AT POLLS AS A RESULT OF KIM'S RESIGNATION, SINCE THEY FEEL THAT CONSCIENTIOUS VOTERS WILL STILL BE OVERWHELMED BY APATHY WHEN ELECTIONS FOR NEXT ASSEMBLY COME.

6. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH KIM'S RESIGNATION SHOULD COST THE NDP SOME VOTER APPEAL, IT DOES NOT APPEAR AT THIS POINT THAT IT WILL CAUSE PARTY SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE OR ALTER ITS ROLE IN NATIONAL POLITICS. IT IS DECIDEDLY ADVANTAGEOUS FOR CANDIDATES TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH A PARTY WHEN CONTESTING AN ELECTION -- FINANCIALLY, ORGANIZATIONALLY, AND BECAUSE PARTIES HAVE POLL WATCHERS BUT INDEPENDENTS DO NOT. IT IS ALSO ADVANTAGEOUS FOR AN OPPOSITION ASSEMBLYMAN TO BELONG TO THE NDP IN TERMS OF ENHANCED PARTICIPATION IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS. FOR EXAMPLE, DUP ASSEMBLYMEN SEEM TO HAVE LESS WEIGHT IN THE CURRENT ASSEMBLY THAN EVEN THE INDEPENDENTS. PRACTICING POLITICIANS WILL HESITATE TO GIVE UP THESE ADVANTAGES. AS FAR AS THE NDP'S APPEAL AT THE POLLS GOES,

THE ELECTIONS ARE RUN IN DISTRICTS, AND THE STATURE OF
THE INDIVIDUAL NDP CANDIDATE WITH LOCAL VOTERS WILL BE
MORE DECISIVE THAN THE FACT THAT KIM TAE-CHUNG IS NO
ONGER A MEMBER OF THE NDP.
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